

ROBERT N. HARPER,

President of the Washington Chamber of Commerce, Who Advocates Rearrangement of Penal Institutions of the District of Columbia.

President Harper Makes Study of Improved Penal Institutions of Country.

Reformation and Not Revenge the Object of Punishment of Criminals.

of the criminal.

To remove the present jail and workhouse to a point farther from the resi- hardened criminal." dence section of the city and there to erect also a prison that will amply accommodate not only these who are sent to the fail and workhouse, but also In this prison or series of apartments

to provide facilities for discriminating so that the first offender may not come in contact with the hardened criminal, be placed in the same cells as convicts, as is at present necessary.

Considers It a Duty.

Mr. Harper believes the Chamber of to all the residents of the District, not hind other cities and States in its method of caring for moral delinquents. He has been devoting much time during test. the past month to a study of penal con ditions in Washington and in other cities and States, with the result that he nov believes that the Capital City of the nation is far behind the lead of others the crime is a first offense, and the in this respect; so far behind, in fact, that he thinks the time has come for leading Washington citizens to bring pressure to bear upon Congress at its next session to frame new laws extending the present classification of criminals and sentences for crime, and providing better facilities for caring for those sentenced to imprisonment by the

No better organization, in his opinion, for bringing pressure to bear upon Congress exists than the Chamber of Commerce.

Studies Systems.

Mr. Harper was asked whether the Chamber would undertake to bring pressure to bear upon Congress to correct conditions relating to the care of crimi nals, and replied that he hoped his

would be done. He, said:
"I have given more or less thought to this subject during the past year, and have made some suggestions as to the methods pursued in many of what might truthfully be termed the more progressive States, as to the laws and

or resting up for further operations in of confinement, is not as shown by their line. We also have a workhouse experience. The time when the pris-for another class of offenders. Then we oner is subject to parole by the board have our penitentiary prisoners who are of managers is just as indefinite as the sent, to West Virginia for their keeping. I am informed that we have about 375 tal. He is paroled under the strictest convicts at Moundsville, which is practically half as many as West Virginia morally cured.

Sent to Another State.

"In the first place I have never understood why we send our penitentiary prisoners to another State for keeping, unless it is for the reason that we have not enough of them to warrant a peni-tentiary of our own. This may be true. but I know of no good reason why we should not build a jall and a peniten-tlary as one, and in this building confine both classes of our criminals.

"In my judgment the present location An entire rearrangement of the penal of our jail could not meet such reinstitutions of the District of Columbia quirements in a practical way. It should, so as to make Washington stand in the with other buildings of like nature, be van of cities with respect to her treat- removed. It is damaging to that section removed. It is damaging to that section ment of criminals and those accused of crime, is to be the object of serious endeavor on the part of the Washington ground it occupies could no doubt be sold for enough to purchase a more desirable and much larger tract for such purposes to urge the following reforms for the District:

Give Judges Power.

Temoved. It is damaging to that section of the serious and lead a life of usefulness as good citizens."

Justice Wendell P. Stafford, of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia, also has the betterment of penal conditions in the District very much at heart. He says, "A nation must be judged by the way it treats its helpless and criminals."

In speaking of the jail here, he says: "We have a jail intended for 300, where almost twice that number are comined two or three crowded in a room, accused and convicted alike, no modern plumbboth classes of criminals, upon a plan New laws which shall give local by which additions may be made from judges more power to use their discre- time to time as necessities may demand. tion in sentencing offenders, with the so that at all times to come there would primary object in view of reformation be at least one cell for each criminal, and thereby remove the possible neces sity of placing a first offender with a

Object Reformation.

Reformation, not vengeance, is the object that should be sought in dealing with every kind of criminal, according those now sent to the penitentlary in to Mr. Harper's ideas. With a jail owded to twice its capacity, making it impossible to discriminate between prisoners, hardened criminals or first among the various classes of offenders. offenders, convicted or accused, with a system of law under which judges are prevented from ameliorating conditions, and that the accused may not have to Mr. Harper sees a very difficult problem to solve, but says: With our hardened class of criminals

all provided for within our own doinain, would then be given an opportunity to deal in a practical way with in General, in which, he states, he will Commerce has a large duty to perform first offender in crime, with reformation in view under what is known in the least part of which is to see to it many of the States as the indetermination that Washington shall not remain be- nate sentence.' I am informed that this has worked admirably in those States where it has been put to a practical

Parole Prisoners.

"In Missouri the trial judges of that State have the power under their criminal code to paroie the prisoner where previous character of the prisoner has

been good. "Illinois has a State reformatory for young men with an indeterminate sen-tence feature attached, with the power of parole resting in a board of man-

has Indiana, New York, Massachusetts, and no doubt others, but from these States I have direct information as to the satisfactory working of the in

stitutions. "In each of these the sentences are for the first offender only and the age ranges from sixteen to thirty years. Some of these States have several re-formatories, all, of course, conducted

the criminals were sent to prison to associate with old, or hardened offenders for a fixed or definite term and be re leased at the end of that period, possibly no better, from a moral standpoint customs obtaining in them. I find that it is not only an interesting subject, but one which is likely to receive more and receive consideration as attention is given to it.

"Our conditions here in Washington are very peculiar and unique, different from those of any State or Territory I know of. We have a jail where some four or five hundred prisoners are kept apparently for the purpose of fattening the fear which has been in the minds and frequently worse than when they

"The seriousness of the problem was well pointed out in The Times Wednesday in an editorial in which the warden of the central prison, of Ontario, was quoted as saying that twenty-four hours' contact with the habitual crimi nal is sufficient to ruln the young and first offender.

"Do not, however, imagine for a nicment that I am disposed to look lightly upon the 'first offender' criminal. I am in favor, and believe such the duty of every good citizen, of bringing before the bars of justice everyone who is guilty of an offense against the laws of his State or country, but at the same time 1 am not blind to the reasoning for giving all a chance to redeem them-selves, and lead a life of usefulness as good citizens."

ing the calls of nature answered in the ceil and out of twenty-four hours of dleness and sloth thirty minutes of

Suggestions Made.

Judge Stafford has given the subject much study, and makes four sugges tions which, he believes, would remedy the present evil conditions, if adopted by Congress. They are:

"An ample and sanitary jail, with careful separation of the convicted and

Warden Harris Here.

Warden Harris, of the United States jail in this city, is now preparing a report for submission to the Attorney make recommendations that are the remake recommendations that are the result of twenty-five years' experience in connection with penal institutions. Mr. Harris corroborates the statements of Mr. Harper and Judge Stafford in regard to the jail, but he is powerless to make any reforms. All ue can do, without further legislation, is to keep the jail in as sanitary condition as possible, which he well succeeds in, as any visitor to the jail may ascertain for him. which he well succeeds in, as any visitor to the jail may ascertain for him

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